

Universal Breakfast



The Basics:

★ How Does Universal Breakfast Work?

When Universal breakfast is offered, breakfast is available at no charge to all students, regardless of their household income. It is usually offered at schools that have a high percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced price meals and often goes hand in hand with breakfast in the classroom, although this is not mandatory. Breakfast is given free to any student who wants it that day; however, the school claims the federal reimbursement at the correct income category for that student. This knowledge is obtained from their lunch applications.

Universal breakfast can be offered with any other serving method – traditional breakfast in the cafeteria before the bell rings, in the classroom, grab ‘n go, or as a mid-morning nutrition break. The serving method depends on the needs of the school. Menus depend on the serving style, but are offered as reimbursable meals.

Many schools find that universal breakfast increases participation so drastically that they don’t actually realize a loss from otherwise paying students. Some schools combine universal breakfast with Provision 2 or 3, which decreases the paperwork involved with offering breakfast in schools with minimal growth from year to year.

★ Why Serve Universal Breakfast?

Most importantly, when you offer universal breakfast, more students eat breakfast. Universal breakfast reduces the stigma attached to eating breakfast at school. It makes breakfast available to those students who may not want to participate in the program for fear of being labeled “poor.” It also provides breakfast for those students who cannot afford the cost of a reduced price breakfast and lunch. In addition, children who participate in universal breakfast tend to have improved attendance, less tardiness, and increased test scores. The quality of their diets also improves. While serving universal breakfast increases labor needs, the overall labor costs per meal are actually less with universal breakfast than with traditional service methods.

★ When Does Universal Breakfast Work Best?

Universal breakfast works well in schools with greater than 75% of students eligible for free and reduced price meals. However, schools with fewer eligible students have operated the program successfully. If the following situations are present your school, universal breakfast is likely to be a success for you:

- Stigma appears to be a factor in low participation rates
- The percent of students eating reduced price breakfast is much lower than expected
- Teachers are supportive of breakfast and realize its importance to learning
- Cafeteria space can accommodate increased participation or breakfast in the classroom is an alternate option

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Success Story:

School: Riverview Elementary School
District: Wautoma Area School District
Contact: Mary Reilly,
 Food Service Director
 920-787-4577
 (reillym@wautoma.k12.wi.us)
 Principal: Ann Fajfer
 (fajfer@wautoma.k12.wi.us)
 Grades served: K-3
 Enrollment: 337
 Free/Reduced: 59%
 Breakfast Participation: 87%
 Lunch Participation: 84%

Four years ago, Mary Reilly, Food Service Director for the Wautoma Area School District, realized that many of the students at Riverview Elementary School were coming to school without having eaten breakfast. The school's new principal and the Administrator wanted to do something about it. At that point, there was no breakfast offered at Riverview. In fact, some of the school's staff would keep snacks for children who complained of hunger or were not able to pay attention in class. Mary had read about universal breakfast and thought that with Riverview's high free and reduced rates, that it would be a great fit. She talked with the principal and Administrator about this possibility and they decided to give it a go.

Each morning, two six foot tall carts are packed with tubs and trays filled with milk, juice, and the breakfast offering for that morning. Breakfasts range from cereal to French toast sticks to cheese pizza hot pockets to the popular muffin squares. Each

tub and tray is labeled with a teacher's name on it. Each cook takes a cart and delivers the tubs and trays to classrooms. A class list is included with the breakfasts, and the teachers record which students take breakfast. All children can eat breakfast for free if they want to. Cooks and teaching assistants collect the class list along with the tubs, trays, and any uneaten food. The children who took breakfast are then recorded and reimbursed at the correct reimbursement rate, even though all students eat for free.

While Mary did not have to hire additional staff, she did have to increase staff hours to meet the demands of feeding almost 300 students breakfast daily. It takes a total of five hours of labor a day to prepare breakfast for this many students, with preparation taking place both the day before and in the morning. In addition, Mary applied for a grant to help increase refrigeration space that she needed to store all the extra breakfast food.

Mary has found that the staff, principal and parents are very supportive of the program, regardless of family income level. Because of the success of the program at Riverview, the other three schools in the district, including a middle and high school, now offer universal breakfast.